

BAPTISTS:

Salvation

by Grace Through Faith Alone

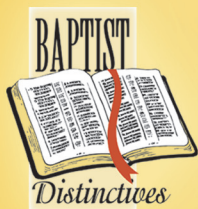
“God’s purpose of grace runs throughout the Bible.

Indeed, the Scriptures teach that this redemptive purpose is from eternity.

Before creation, an omniscient God knew that man would sin and would need to be saved.

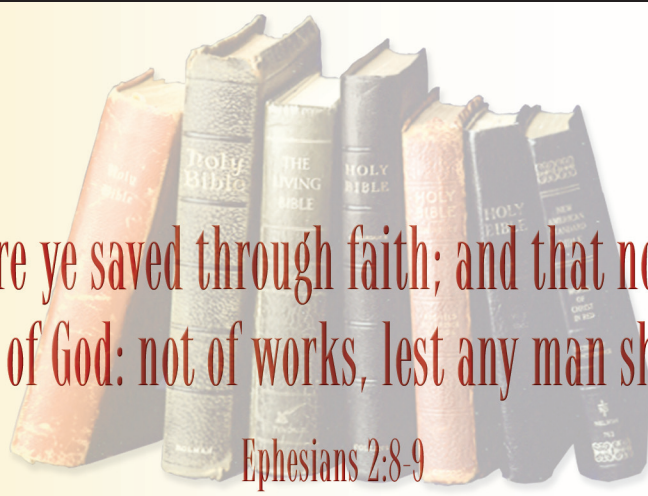
However, God’s foreknowledge of the event did not cause it. It came through the exercise of man’s free will.”

Herschel H. Hobbs,
Baptist pastor and theologian
Quote from *The Baptist Faith and Message*, rev. ed., p. 55



Wanting to share information about Baptist distinctives, Noble Hurley, shortly before his death in 2004, established the Jane and Noble Hurley Baptist Identity Fund for the purpose of publishing this series and asked William M. Pinson Jr. and Doris A. Tinker to prepare the articles. © (Article 6)

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.”



Ephesians 2:8-9

Casual conversations, movies, television shows, comic cartoons all indicate that the popular concept of salvation seems to be this: When a person dies, God weighs the good deeds and the bad. If the good outweighs the bad, the person gets into heaven. If the bad outweighs the good, the person goes to hell. (Sometimes hell is not even in the picture.) In other words, human effort and work pave the road to either heaven or hell.

The Bible’s portrayal of salvation is entirely different. The Bible clearly teaches that all have sinned (Romans 3:23) and that the penalty for sin is eternal death. However, God by his grace has provided a way for sin to be forgiven, hell avoided and heaven gained. That way is faith in his Son, Jesus Christ (Romans 6:23).

Salvation, according to the Bible, is solely by grace and faith, not by human effort or works (Ephesians 2:8-9). While not denying the value of good works, **throughout our history Baptists have proclaimed the truth that salvation is only by grace through faith.**

Grace/Faith Alone for Salvation

Baptists believe that the Bible teaches that all human beings have chosen to sin, that is, to disobey God. The consequence of sin is eternal death. Persons are not capable of saving themselves from this plight. God, out of love for humankind, has provided salvation (John 3:16).

God’s gift of salvation is available through faith in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. By his life and by his death on the cross, Jesus offers a way from eternal death to eternal life. That way is an expression of God’s grace. The way can be walked only by faith (Romans 5:1-2).

Although the Bible uses different word pictures to describe how Jesus provides salvation for lost humanity, in each case the message is clear: Salvation is available only through faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Some denominations have included such things as baptism, church membership, good works or sacraments as necessary for salvation. **Baptists have insisted that salvation comes only by faith in God’s grace gift of Jesus.**

Salvation Is Both Free and Costly

While Baptists insist that salvation is free, a gift from God, they also proclaim its cost. Salvation cost God the death of his only begotten Son. Salvation cost Jesus the humiliation, suffering and death by crucifixion on a cross for our sins. Sharing the message of salvation through the centuries has cost a multitude of faithful witnesses torture, imprisonment and death. Salvation also costs the person who responds by faith to God’s grace gift; it costs that person his or her old

way of life, a death to self (Matthew 16:24-25).

Therefore, salvation ought never be considered lightly. To speak of salvation flippantly is to deny its vast significance. Baptists believe that the eternal destiny of all persons depends on their faith response to God’s grace gift of Jesus. Therefore, Baptists are noted for passionate evangelistic and missionary efforts.

Salvation Is a Process of Grace through Faith

Practically all Baptist statements of belief emphasize that the Bible reveals that salvation includes “regeneration” (some statements use “justification”), “sanctification” and “glorification.” Some Baptists express it this way: We have been saved from the punishment of sin (regeneration), we are being saved from the power of sin (sanctification), and we will be saved from the presence of sin (glorification). Or as others phrase it: We have been saved; we are being saved; we will be saved.

However the truth is expressed, the emphasis remains on grace and faith. God’s grace enables a person not only to begin the Christian journey but also to complete it. The way of salvation is walked by faith (Galatians 2:16-20).

The process of salvation results in changed lives, not only for the hereafter, but also for the here and now. **Good works do not result in salvation, but salvation is to result in good works (Ephesians 2:10).**

True Faith Cannot Be Forced

Baptists insist that effort should never be made to try to force a person to believe in Jesus for salvation. In fact, Baptists believe that true faith cannot be coerced. Faith to be genuine must be voluntary. Baptists note that Jesus never compelled anyone to follow him. Jesus’ ministry indicates that persons have competency to choose to believe in him or to reject him. Although Jesus clearly laid out the consequences of belief and unbelief, he never used any sort of force when he urged persons to follow him. Furthermore, Jesus’ disciples always presented faith as a voluntary response to the gospel.

Therefore, Baptists have insisted that persons should never be coerced into professing faith in Jesus. As George W. Truett observed, “Persecution may make men hypocrites, but it will not make them Christians.” **Baptists have consistently advocated freedom of choice—that is, religious freedom.**

Grace/Faith and God’s Sovereignty/Humankind’s Free Will

While Baptists agree that the Bible teaches that salvation is always and only

by grace through faith alone, they have differed on how grace and faith are involved in salvation. For example, not all Baptists have agreed on the relationship of God’s sovereignty and humankind’s free will.

Some Baptists have stressed God’s sovereignty and held that only those whom God in his grace has predestined for salvation will be saved by faith; they contend that this salvation cannot be lost. Other Baptists have stressed humankind’s free will and generally held that anyone who responds by faith to God’s grace gift of salvation can be saved; some of them believe that this salvation can be lost.

Most Baptists believe that the Bible sets forth both God’s sovereignty and humankind’s freedom of choice.

Although these two truths seem irreconcilable in human wisdom, Baptists generally hold to both and often do so without any effort to reconcile them. As the Baptists who wrote the Articles of Faith for the Union Baptist Association in 1840 stated, “We believe in the doctrine of God’s sovereignty, and man’s free agency as an accountable being.” They also declared, “We believe in the final perseverance of the saints by grace unto glory.”

Thus most Baptists contend that a person has freedom of choice to believe in Christ as his or her Lord and Savior or to reject Christ. They insist that anyone who responds through repentance and faith in Jesus’ atoning life, death and resurrection can be saved (1 Timothy 2:3-4; 2 Peter 3:9; 1 John 2:2). With conviction they quote the words of Jesus, “Whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:15). They also believe that once he or she has been truly saved, a person is kept by the power of God; this is often termed the security of the believer (John 10:27-30).

Conclusion

Although not all Baptists agree on the meaning of grace and faith, all Baptists agree that salvation results only from God’s grace through faith.

Salvation is never viewed as a human achievement but is always seen as a divine gift. Baptists with one voice declare that salvation is not by works but by faith.

Thus Baptists unanimously assert that baptism, church membership, the Lord’s Supper and good works, while important, are never necessary for salvation; only grace through faith is sufficient.

For further information on salvation by grace through faith alone, see www.baptistdistinctives.org.